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S E R M O N,

PREACHED IN
THE CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF DURHAM,

ON THE 17TH OF SEPTEMBER, 1793,

ON THE OPENING OF
THE PUBLIC INFIRMARY,
OF THAT CITY,

K
BY THOMAS DAMPIER, D. D. DEAN OF ROCHESTER.

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1793.

SERMON

PREACHED IN

THE CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF DURHAM

ON THE 17TH OF SEPTEMBER, 1793

BY THE REV. JOHN

THE PUBLIC LIBRARY



BY THOMAS STANLEY, D.D. DEAN OF ROCHESTER

DURHAM

PRINTED BY J. JOHNSON, ST. PAULS CHURCH-YARD

IN THE YEAR 1793

DEUTERONOMY x.

“FOR THE POOR SHALL NEVER CEASE OUT OF THE LAND: THERE-

“FORE I COMMAND THEE, SAYING, THOU SHALT OPEN THINE

“HAND WIDE UNTO THY BROTHER, TO THY POOR,

“AND TO THY NEEDY, IN THY LAND.”

TO whatever Causes we may be inclined to attribute the Inequality in the Condition of Mankind, whatever were the Circumstances, which at the first gathering together, or in the earliest Periods of Society, tended so to arrange them, as that though the Earth and the Fullness thereof, was given in common to the Sons of Men, some should abound, others want, some be invested with Power, others subordinate to it; of this we may be certain, that such an Order of

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Things could not have taken Place, much less have continually and universally subsisted, but under the Authority and permissive Providence of the Creator and Governor of the World. All his Dispositions are wise and good, and as we are all equally his Creatures, equally the Objects of his paternal Care, and upheld by his superintending Providence, as in the ineffimable Benefits of Redemption there is no Respect of Persons, but the same Calling, the same Hope, the same Promises are vouchsafed alike to all, so had such been his Pleasure, might he have extended the same Equality to all the external Circumstances of our Condition in this Life. That he has not done so is manifest, that such was not his Will is equally manifest, as well because though possible with him, it is beyond the Powers of the human Mind to conceive any other Disposition, under which Men can be placed, more on an Equality; as, because that under which they are actually classed, however unequal in its Proportions, may be proved to tend to many wise and beneficial Ends, to be well suited to the Condition of Man, and the moral Economy of the World.

Our Enquiries will assure us in general, that such a System is most fitting for, and may be said ultimately to constitute that State of Trial and Probation under which God has placed us. From the va-

rious Distinctions of Mankind, and the Disparity of what is severally given them to possess, most of the Duties incumbent on us, and particularly those which are most difficult in the Performance, have their Origin. Thus, in all the infinite Circumstances and Occurrences of Life, is Opportunity afforded for the pursuit of Virtue, and Resistance of Vice and its Allurements. Were our Condition here such, as that the whole Race of Men were reduced to one common Level, and so tied down in the Bonds of a regular Equality, as that no Exertion could break them asunder, nor effect any Change in a Constitution thus fixed, the Circle of our Obligations would be contracted to that Degree, as that there would be little Merit in Obedience. Our Work would not be proportioned to its Reward, nor would a suitable Exertion be required for Beings endued with such Power and Faculties as we are. We should almost of Necessity be virtuous, because the Temptation to be otherwise would scarcely exist, and if attended to, would fail to procure to its Victims, what alone they can expect, present Gratification.

It were easy to apply and illustrate the Truth of this general Observation, by descending into the particular Relations, in which we

stand to each other. Numberless as these are, they would all be found, excepting those natural ones, which are inseparable from us, under any Constitution of Society, to be the Consequence of this varied Allotment of earthly Things. Without adverting to any intermediate, consider these only which belong to the two Extremes of Riches and Poverty, Superfluity and Indigence. These however widely separated, yet meet together under the gracious Administration of the Maker of them both, and fulfil the just Purposes of his moral Government. What have those whose Lot is fallen in the fairest Ground, who have the goodliest Heritage, which they have not received, and for which they are not accountable? It is not their own; it is, as our Lord has so emphatically and repeatedly told us, but a Trust, to be executed only by the Virtues of Meekness, Condescension, Charity, Benevolence; that, to use the Words of the Apostle, in the Exercise of these, one Man's Abundance supplying another Man's Wants, there may be an Equality. Nor let the poor and needy complain that they are thus subjected to a Dependence on others. They did not make themselves, and God is not unrighteous, who has appointed them a different, and less difficult State of Trial. Humility and Patience, Contentment and Resignation, a sure Confi-

dence in him and his Goodness, are the Duties which he has annexed to their humble Sphere.

If we discern that such Purposes are answered by God's Distribution of temporal Blessings, we cannot fail to have Reason to justify his Wisdom; nor shall we be less bound to praise his Goodness also, when from a nearer View of this present Inequality we discover that it exists more in external Circumstances, than those that affect the real and substantial Comfort of his Creatures. So mercifully and impartially has he distributed the Ingredients of Happiness among all Ranks, that in this important Respect they are all nearly on a Level. The inconsiderate Eye, dazzled with the glittering Tinsel of preeminent Stations, sees nothing but proportionate Enjoyment, nor does it view the lowly Mansions where Poverty, or, at most, the Means of a narrow Competency subsist, without finding within a proportionate Degree of Misery. Far different the Estimate which he will make, who knows how to strip off the gaudy Trappings of the one, and to search out the secret Consolations which are the Inmates of the other. He will place in the one Scale, Discontent, Satiety, Uneasiness, Indolence, incessant Cares; in the other Temperance, Contentment, Activi-

ty, and its Companion Health, and that Carefulness alone which belongs to a Condition for which Labour is to find Subsistence. Vicious Habits and Affections may indeed add to the Evils which hang on the Possession of Affluence, and impair, if not annihilate the comfortable Resources of the Poor, but constant Experience will justify the Assertion that the Balance of these opposite Conditions taken simply by themselves, are, even here, at least even; and if we add, that from him to whom much or little is given, much or little will be required, and that the unequal Dispensations of this World are preparatory to, and will be rectified in another, the comparative Happiness of each is still more easily ascertained.

The Inferences arising from what has been said are obvious, and lead me to discharge usefully, the Commission entrusted to me on the present charitable Occasion. They direct themselves not only to the Affluent, whose Benevolence I have to solicit, but those who hereafter may become the Objects of it.

To these latter is to be recommended the consequent Duty of humble Resignation to that Station, however low it may be, in which they are placed by their Creator. The Means of Happiness which are annex-

ed to it, are neither so few or inconsiderable as to justify an envious Discontent, or that Jealousy of the more exalted Situation of others, which tends only to deprive them of Comforts which are certainly their own. Besides, the Road to Advancement is shut against none, and daily Experience will testify that when pursued under the Guidance of Industry, and its attendant Virtues, it gradually opens better Prospects, and can lead the meanest onward to comparative Affluence and Prosperity.

This their Duty towards God is closely connected with others due to Society, which subsists but on the Conformity of the several component Parts to its established Laws and Principles. These are violated not only by Intemperance, Strife, Malevolence, but by the Vices which they engender, Disquiet, Opposition and Ingratitude to Superiors, and Insubordination to those appointed to rule over them. How serious and inevitable a Load of Misery do the lower Orders heap on themselves, by giving Admission or Indulgence to such Affections. Great as the Inconveniences of their Condition may be, such Conduct, instead of procuring a Remedy, will but exceedingly magnify them. It will prove the surest Means of suppressing that Spirit of Diligence, by which it is their duty to procure their Subsistence; will create in

them a Disinclination to all honest Employment ; will impair their Reputation, that precious Reward which the World never fails to bestow on every one that acts as he ought to do ; will withdraw from them the Protection of all good Men, and that benevolent Attention which by such is ever employed to encourage their honest Endeavours, and relieve them in their Distresses ; and above will fill their Minds with unavailing Remorse and Disappointment.

But while I offer these very momentous Truths to your Reflection, and still farther insist that the Happiness and Virtue of a poor Man consists in studying to be Quiet and to mind his own Business, I may be thought to preach a less palatable Doctrine, than that contrary one, which not long since resounded from one End of this Kingdom to the other, of the natural Equality of Man, and I know not what Rights and Pretensions appendant to it, that the Will and Opinion of the Multitude is a Law, to which all others are to bend, that the Power is in their Hands, which they have been called on, as Occasions offer, to assert. But it is our Duty not to mislead, but to instruct, to speak the Truth with Sobriety, to advise and caution, not flattering the Vanity of our unlettered and undiscerning Brethren, by inspiring Notions, the Danger and Treachery of which they cannot discover,

but offering the Antidotes of Reason and Religion against them. This has already been attempted in some Degree, to say more is unnecessary, as the Alternative may securely be left to each Man's Choice. If the Rich and Affluent have much at Stake, the Poor have more. For, not to advert to innumerable other Considerations, let them reflect on this single one. The former may in the Time of Trouble transport themselves, and a Competency of their Possessions, to some distant Region, and there wait a happier Season; but the Poor is fixed and tied down to the Spot on which he stands. He must bear the utmost fierceness of the Storm which tears up the Foundations of Society, and be a trembling Witness of the Ruin of that System, which was used to give him Security in his Property, his Liberty, and his Life; the failure of those numerous and abundant Fountains of Munificence, to which he could heretofore resort in the Hour of Misfortune. How unfeelingly cruel and wicked are those, who by poisoning and tampering with the Understandings of their humble Neighbours, recommend to them Principles, which however specious in their Appearance, lead directly, or in their Consequences to such Wretchedness as this.

We indeed, as the Purpose of this Meeting must sufficiently declare, assume to ourselves the Praise of a more worthy Attention to their Wants and Interests. We know the Distresses inseparable from their Situation; we, for I trust that none of us who have the Means are ever unmindful of the Necessities and Misfortunes of a worthy Neighbour or Dependant, feel and compassionate them; and in Addition to the secret Exertions of private Benevolence, have on this Day the sincere and gratifying Satisfaction of opening to the Poor of this populous City, an Asylum from the most severe and pitiable to which they can be exposed.

It is a pleasing Contemplation to trace back the various Steps through which this Institution from Beginnings which promised no such extensive Benefits, has within a few Years grown to its present Maturity; to mark the gradual Improvement of the most charitable Design of a worthy Person* now removed from hence, from Imperfection and comparative Obscurity, to the Period when it is enabled to assume a public and established Station. Much of this must we attribute to the unwearied Perseverance in well-doing of those who have been its constant Friends, much to the voluntary Exertion of

* Dr William Blackburne, of Spring Gardens, London.

medical Skill, which has been as unremitted as it is disinterested much to the daily and visible good Effects accruing from it, which have called forth new Donations, and above all to that Liberality to which we are indebted for the Mansion itself,* and the various suitable Accommodations with which it is provided. Nor have we less Pleasure in estimating the Advantages to be expected from this infant Institution, in looking forward to a future greater Extension of it, in anticipating an Increase of its Protectors, and consequently of its usefulness. But this must depend not only on the Support of our present numerous and respectable Contributors, but on the additional Encouragement which, such an Establishment being formed, and thus publicly announced, we look for from others. The Continuance of former Benefactions it would be ungrateful to doubt, nor are we willing to think it possible to be deceived in our anxious Hopes that we shall find many new Friends. For what is it that we solicit? The Means of relieving those from one of the greatest of human Calamities, whose Indigence precludes them from relieving themselves. Few are so happy in their Progress through Life as to be Strangers to Sickness and Infirmary, or not to know and have felt that with every Aid that the tender Anxiety of Friends, or the exertion of professional

* Thomas Wilkinson, Esq. Coxhoe.

Knowledge can administer, it is a Visitation to be dreaded. How severe then, and almost intolerable must it be, when superadded to Poverty. Those who have never witnessed it, can form but an imperfect Idea of the complicated Wretchedness of that Man, whose Hands, which before laboriously procured him a scanty Maintenance, are enervated by Sicknes, who, has not wherewithal to procure any Remedy for it, who, under the joint pressure of Calamity and suspended Resources, perhaps sees a Family suffering with him, and offering Consolation of which they themselves stand in need. We cannot, I trust, in vain offer such Objects to your Benevolence, not be doubtful, but that every one, who has the Means however small of assisting them, and there are many in this Neighbourhood, from whom we are well warranted to look for it, will contribute to such an End. There are indeed those, who in Opposition to all that Religion and Humanity can suggest, will fortify themselves with Pretences against every charitable Act. We argue not with them; they cannot be our Friends. But if there be any who are backward in their Approbation of this particular Institution, it must be on Grounds of which we are ignorant. One alone suggests itself, that an Infirmary for this Place is less necessary, from the Opportunity which it enjoys of participating the Advantages of that excellent

one which has so long been among the Ornaments of the neighbour-Town. But if we consider the Distance, the great Inconvenience and Danger of removing those who are maimed by Accidents, or suffering under the Attack of any acute Disease; that besides, the Population there is abundantly sufficient to furnish Objects for all the Assistance which it can bestow, that they appear to have a prior Claim to it, any Objection on this Head must be removed. No Competition is intended; our humble Project must preclude the Suspicion.

I will not so far mistrust the humane Feelings of those around me, as to think any more urgent Address is necessary. It is enough for them to be apprised of this Call upon their Benevolence. They cannot be deaf to it as they are Friends to themselves, for it is a Call of Duty; to their poorer Brethren, for their Distresses are before them; to the Community, for that is benefited by the Return of every worthy and useful and worthy Member, whom, under the Providence of God, their Liberality may contribute to restore. May each, according to his Ability, cheerfully attend to it, so shall we down from the Temple comforted in our Hearts, with the joyful Consciousness of having done a good Action before him who will both see and reward it.

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not be deaf to it as they would be to the Minister, for it is a Call of
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to the Community, for it is a demand by the Reason of every worthy
and useful and worthy Member, who, under the Providence of God,
their Liberty may contribute to the good of the whole. What each, according to
his Ability, cheerfully contributes to the good of the whole, from the Temple
of Liberty, and the Temple of Liberty, with the Temple of Liberty, and
a good Action before him who will both be and reward it.

